



*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 3-24-08*****

From the Office of the Director of Health

World Tuberculosis Day Somber Reminder

On World Tuberculosis Day, March 24th, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department joins the world in recognizing the continued seriousness of tuberculosis – one of the world's deadliest diseases.

"Each year more nearly nine million people around the world become sick with tuberculosis, and about two million people die of TB," says administrator of community health and epidemiology Kendra Williams.

"While the majority of those cases occur outside the United States, we do see a number of tuberculosis cases locally, especially in people who move into Greene County from other countries with different TB treatment standards."

Tuberculosis is a contagious disease spread from person-to-person on airborne droplets that are expelled from the lungs of an infected person when he coughs, sneezes or talks. The bacteria usually take root in the air sacs of the lungs. In a healthy person, the bacteria are quickly surrounded by a wall of cells, which limits their spread. This enclosed infection is called *latent TB* and can last throughout a person's life without ever causing medical symptoms or being spread to other people.

However, if a person infected with latent TB develops a weakened immune system – through HIV infection, malnutrition, aging or other causes – the TB can become active again and spread throughout the lungs or other tissues. This person now has *active TB* and can infect other people.

"TB is the leading killer of people who are HIV infected," adds Williams. "This is an added concern."

In order to protect public health, the health department offers Greene County residents treatment for active or latent TB at no cost. The health department also offers TB skin tests to the public at minimal cost.

For more information, call (417) 864-1697 or visit <http://www.springfieldmo.gov/health/tb.html>. For skin tests contact the Westside Public Health Center at (417) 874-1220.

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